

CITRUS CENTER

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NEWSLETTER

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DR ELSA MURANO VISITS THE CITRUS CENTER

Dr Elsa Murano, the new Vice-Chancellor and Dean of Agriculture & Life Sciences of Texas A & M University, and Director of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station in College Station, recently visited the Valley at the invitation of a group of stakeholders representing the fruit, vegetable, and sugarcane industries and the irrigation districts. A luncheon in her honor was hosted by the Citrus Center at which she was introduced to faculty from the Weslaco Center (Citrus Center, TAES and TCE). She was accompanied Dr Peter Murano (Department of Animal Science, College Station), Dr Larry Boleman (Assistant Deputy Vice Chancellor for special projects), Dr Roland Smith (TCE), Dr Bhimu Patil (Vegetable & Fruit Improvement Center Director), and Dr Leonard Pike (former VFIC Director). Other guests included Dr Ron Rosati, Dean of the College of Agriculture & Human Sciences in Kingsville, Dr Bill Holloway, Resident Director of the Uvalde Research & Extension Center, Dr Dan Leskovar from Uvalde, and Dr Kendal Hirschi from the Baylor College of Medicine.



See Murano Page 3

MITES ABUNDANT

Texas citrus mite (TCM) and citrus red mite (RdM) infestations have been relatively heavy in many Valley orchards this spring. These spider mite outbreaks have undoubtedly been favored by the hot and dry weather conditions that have prevailed for the past 3-4 months. Both species are fast moving and readily visible with the unaided eye—TCM adults and nymphs are oval and yellowish-green with irregular dark green spots on the edges of the body; RdM are globoid and velvet red with prominent bristles on distended tubercles. They feed mainly on the upper surface of leaves that become yellowed and chlorotic, with wilting and defoliation occurring particularly when trees are stressed from lack of water. While not extensive, we have observed some early season defoliation in Valley orchards due to spider mite feeding injury.

False spider mites (FSM) are also beginning to show up in some Valley orchards. FSM are pear shaped, dull to bright red and visible only with the aid of a hand lens (1/200 inch). Most numerous on the interior tree canopy, FSM all too often go undetected until their feeding damage "nail head rust" appears on grapefruit and oranges. Brown, irregular-shaped and ranging in size from 1/8-1/2 inch diameter—the spotting seriously downgrades marketability as fresh fruit. To date, we have seen no FSM-related spotting on this season's fruit crop.

Kelthane[®] MF (dicofol), Comite[®] (propargite), and Vendex[®] 50 WP (fenbutatin-oxide) are miticides commonly recommended for spider mite / false spider mite control. Registration of the new miticide, Envidor[®] (spirodiclofen) Bayer CropScience product, is anticipated in the near future and is also effective against the aforementioned mite species.

J. Victor French

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO RELEASE A NEW CITRUS VARIETY?

There is considerable interest in the “Texas Red” grapefruit variety currently being propagated for evaluation at the Citrus Center (see April 2005 newsletter p.3). Understandably, growers are keen to get it as soon as possible, and we are frequently being asked when it will be available. Before a new variety can be released, it has to be grown for several years to ensure that the fruit is true-to-type, is of acceptable size, shape, internal and external quality, and that the trees bear fruit well and consistently. To get an idea of when it (or other variants currently under test) may be released, we looked back at the time it took to release current grapefruit varieties here in Texas and elsewhere. The following table summarizes what we found:

Variety	State or country	Source	Year started	Year released	No. of years
Star Ruby	Texas	Hudson seed	1959	1970	11
Star Ruby	South Africa	TX Star Ruby seed	1972	1986	14
Flame	Florida	Henderson seed	1974	1987	13
Ray Ruby	Texas	Whole tree	1979	1977	8
Rio Red	Texas	A&I 1-48 budsport	1976	1984	8

If this new dark red variety turns out to have commercial potential, it will probably take about 8 years to be ready for release since it is derived from a budsport - 2012 would therefore be a realistic release date. Any variety derived from seed takes longer because the tree has to grow out of the juvenile phase before it starts bearing fruit.

Eliezer Louzada & John da Graca

***PHYTOPHTHORA* OR TOO MUCH FERTILIZER?**

Recently, I received some small, greenhouse-grown citrus plants for as to why they are dying. The plants showed general wilting, especially in the top portion, and leaves were curled with most having lost their green color. The top portion of the plant exhibited a general wilt symptom. The root system had extensive damage of the feeder roots; most lost their outer cover on roots, a symptom commonly associated with *Phytophthora* infection. An attempt to isolate a fungal pathogen from the roots resulted in a high level of *Phytophthora* infection being identified. My discussions with the nursery operator revealed that these plants accidentally received a high dose of fertilizer, which damaged the root system, allowing *Phytophthora* to be established on the roots.



Phytophthora in a citrus nursery, whether it is a primary or secondary infection, can cause extensive damage; the nursery could easily become a distribution center for *Phytophthora*. *Phytophthora* infection in a nursery has the potential to cause an industry-wide infection, whereas an infection started in an orchard is limited to that location. One way to avoid such a problem is to conduct some routine tests for *Phytophthora* in both plants and potting mixes. Early detection is important because there are effective ways to control *Phytophthora* through systemic fungicides and water management.

Mani Skaria

AWARDS FOR CITRUS CENTER PERSONNEL

Two events were held in Kingsville recently at which several present and former Citrus Center employees were recognized for the achievements in 2004. At the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences Awards Banquet, **Dr Victor French** received the Faculty Award for Excellence in Service for his dedicated extension activities in support of the citrus growers, **Dr Bhimu Patil** (who since January has been the Director of the Vegetable & Fruit Improvement Center in College Station) received a special award for excellence in research, and the outstanding Graduate Students' Awards went to **Shibu Poulouse**, a cooperative PhD student of Dr Patil, and **Veronica Ancona**, an MS student of Dr Louzada and Dr Nelson.

At the University's Service Awards Luncheon, five employees were recognized for long service: **Teodoro (Teddy) Medrano** (35 years), **Arturo Torres** (30 years), **Terry Gonzales** (15 years), **John Watson** (15 years) and **Refugio (Cuco) Rodriguez** (10 years). In addition, **Terry Gonzales** received the Employee of the Year Award for the Citrus Center.

Congratulations to everyone.

John da Graca

Murano From Page 1

Dr Murano was interviewed by reporters from the local media, and then the visitors made a brief tour of the Center. They then visited the J & D Produce vegetable packing shed in Edinburg and the TCX juice plant in Mission. A well-attended evening reception sponsored by the stakeholders was held for her at the Cimmarron Country Club. In a speech Dr Murano thanked everyone, and outlined her vision for the future of the Experiment Station.

Dr Murano worked as professor of animal science and Director of the Center for Food Safety in College Station until July 2001 when President Bush appointed her as Under Secretary for Food Safety in the USDA. She served in this position until January of this year when she returned to College Station to assume her new leadership positions.

John da Graca

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